Men-at-Arms

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The Polish Army 1939–45

Steven J Zaloga • Illustrated by Richard Hook

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Introduction

Poland was the first of the Allied nations to succumb to German aggression in the Second World War, but by the most tortuous of routes her army managed to remain in the field through all five years of bloody fighting. In fact by the war's end the Polish Army was the fourth largest contingent of the Allied coalition after the armed forces of the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain. Polish soldiers fought in nearly every major campaign in the European theatre, and their tale is a complicated and tragic one. The heroic efforts of the Polish Army were often rendered meaningless by political events far outside their control. Fate was very cruel to the Polish nation during those years, and especially cruel to her soldiers.

* * *

The Polish Army of 1939 was very much a creature of its founder, Josef Pilsudski. Pilsudski, the erstwhile socialist and revolutionary, had formed and led the barefoot Polish forces in the battles for independence in 1918. After 125 years of foreign

Poland's pride: a troop from a mounted unit parades in Warsaw before the war. They wear the stiffened garrison cap, perhaps with the amaranth band of Mounted Rifles.

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This Polish infantry company photographed shortly before the war retain the old French RSC gasmask canister, and the long puttees then being replaced by short anklets. The arm-of-service stripe across the coat collar points is just visible.

domination Poland was resurrected by the Allied victors at the Versailles peace conference. No firm borders were established, however, and it was only through armed revolt that the new western borders with Germany were established. The real contest waited in the east, where both Poland and Bolshevik Russia were eyeing the ex-Czarist territories between them, inhabited by a polyglot mixture of Poles, Byelorussians, Ukrainians and Jews. In 1920 the Polish Army under Pilsudski took the initiative and seized Kiev, deep in the Ukraine. They were just as dramatically routed by the Red Cossack Horse Army, and Poland's fate hung in the balance. At the moment of Bolshevik victory, however, the southern forces of the Red Army under the political command of Iosef Stalin failed to come to the aid of Tukhachevsky's northern forces, who were pounding at the gates of Warsaw itself. Pilsudski brilliantly seized the opportunity, and the Red Army was sent reeling back in confusion. The euphoria of the moment eclipsed the serious economic, social and political problems the new state faced. Poland was now sandwiched between two temporarily weak, but bitter and vengeful neighbours.

The victorious Polish Army emerged from the 1920 war proud and confident. Pilsudski shunned offers of political power, but by 1926 Poland's ill-fated attempts at parliamentary democracy prompted him to stage a coup d'état. He ruled the country from the shadows until his death in 1935, when his supporters formed a 'colonel's regime' which guided the country with far less success until the outbreak of war in 1939. The army was Pilsudski's pride, and a grateful nation spared no expense for its upkeep. It received a far larger share of the national budget than was received by most other European armies of the time, but this was still a pathetically small sum compared to the expenditures of Germany or the Soviet Union. The money required to equip an armoured division exceeded the total annual budget for the entire Polish Army—Poland was a rural and backward country with little industry. Pilsudski managed to weave the Army's disparate strands into a cohesive force, although its officers had served in the imperial armies of Austro-Hungary, Prussia and Czarist Russia, and it was equipped with a remarkable hodge-podge of hand-me-down weapons from nearly every major arsenal in Europe. However, Pilsudski was not a professionally trained officer, and the Polish Army reflected his frailties as well as his strengths. Higher staff training and command organisation were rudimentary and there was excessive reliance on 'improvisation'. There was little understanding or enthusiasm for the new technological tools of

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If the cavalry was the élite, the Horse Artillery was the élite of the élite. In this 1939 exercise a battery deploys the 75mm Model 02/26 field gun, a re-chambered version of the Czarist 3in. Putilov divisional gun; this venerable weapon proved most effective against German tanks, thanks to the quality of the crews.

war like motor vehicles, aircraft and tanks.

The organisation and tactics of the Polish Army were heavily influenced by the experiences of the 1920 Russo-Polish war. In contrast to the war on the Western Front from 1914 to 1918, the 1920 war was characterised by great mobility. This was the mobile war of a bygone era made possible by the dearth of modern weapons. Certainly there were aeroplanes, machine guns and armoured cars, or at least enough to give the war a superficially modern appearance, but there were not enough of these weapons significantly to affect the nature of the conflict. The machine gun had sounded the death knell of the cavalry in Western Europe in 1914, but there were so few automatic weapons in use in 1920 that the cavalry proved to be the dominant arm during the war. Polish cavalry emerged from the campaign crowned in glory and assured of a place of honour in the post-war army. With some reluctance, its tactics and organisation were to some degree updated. Mounted charges were discouraged in favour of attacks on foot, and in 1934 the lance was officially dropped as a weapon, though it remained in widespread use as a training device. The cavalry regiments were the cream of the army, attracting the best officers and men.

The nightmare of trench warfare drove men like Martel, Liddell-Hart, de Gaulle and Guderian to search for a mechanised antidote to the dominance of the machine gun and breech-loaded howitzer. Polish military leaders had not undergone these horrors and were immune to the deep seated anxieties that fed the call for military mechanisation in Western Europe. In 1939 the Polish Army remained organised on a basis not much different from an army of the First World War. It was based around 30 infantry divisions and 11 cavalry brigades—the cavalry amounted to about ten per cent of the army. There was very little motorisation, and signals equipment was primitive. The artillery branch was almost entirely horse-drawn; its equipment was all of First World War type, and it was under strength even by those standards. In response to the resurgence of a militant Germany with the rise of the Nazis, a commission was formed in 1936 to begin the modernisation of the Polish Army. Recognising Poland's very weak industrial base, it recommended the mechanisation of four of the cavalry brigades by 1942, expansion of the tank force and artillery, and an immediate crash effort to build up anti-tank and anti-aircraft equipment. By the outbreak of war in 1939 these efforts had achieved modest results. A single mechanised brigade was ready, and another was forming. The tank force received three battalions of excellent light tanks to add to the hundreds of tiny tankettes scattered about in scouting units with the cavalry brigades and infantry divisions. The army adopted an excellent Bofors 37mm anti-tank gun and a Polish-designed anti-tank rifle that would give the Germans a very rough time in 1939.

As war approached, Polish military leaders completed work on Plan Z (*Zachod* = West): the defence of Poland against Germany. Poland's leaders were under few delusions about the likely results of such a conflict. In the best of circumstances, they hoped to be able to hold out for about six months until the Western allies, France and Britain, had intervened. The Poles clung to assurances from the French that a major offensive would be undertaken two weeks after France declared war. The Poles had excellent assessments of German troop build-ups and plans. As early as 1933 they had broken the Enigma code, although a new technique introduced by the Germans in late 1938 cut off this source of information. Unfortunately the Polish High Com-

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1st Light Horse Regt. trooper displaying peacetime insignia. The round-topped cap of the three Light Horse units has a crimson band. The collar bears the distinctive Polish 'zig-zag' decoration, in silver tape for privates and lance corporals and in silver thread embroidery from the rank of corporal up. It encloses the regimental pennon, here silver with a central crimson stripe. The shoulder strap slide bears the monogram 'JP' for the regiment's honorary title—'1st Josef Pilsudski Light Horse Regiment'.

Polish infantry parading in full 1936 field service dress. The dark blue collar patches have scalloped yellow piping at the rear edge and the usual silver zig-zag, but bear no applied insignia. The standard weapon is a Polish-made derivative of the Mauser 98; the second soldier in the front rank has the standard light machine gun, a Polish-made Browning Automatic Rifle designated 'rkm wz.28' in Polish service.

mand believed their intelligence estimates to be excessive, and therefore underestimated the real strength of the Wehrmacht in 1939. More critically, they had no comprehension of the mobility or striking power of the German Panzer divisions—a blindness shared by military circles throughout Europe at that time. Their own limited experience with their pitiful tankettes led them to deride the value of armoured units and exaggerate their logistical weaknesses. They similarly over-looked the enormous advantage in firepower offered by artillery support and airpower.

The strategic options open to the Polish Army were unenviable. Germany and her allies were on three sides, on the fourth was the Soviet Union. The Poles assumed that the ideological gap between the Nazis and the Soviets was unbridgeable, and therefore left the eastern border unprotected. Poland is a flat plain with no natural boundaries except for mountains in the south. The centre of the country is criss-crossed by major rivers which offer the alluring prospect of potential defensive barriers, but in fact in late summer the rivers are quite low and easily fordable at many points. Moreover, to employ these barriers from the beginning of the campaign would mean abandoning a large portion of the population and most of Poland's industry and military stockpiles. This was politically unthinkable and militarily dubious. The other alternative was to concentrate forces opposite the main anticipated thrusts in the border areas and wage a fighting retreat; and this was the course chosen. Such a plan stretched Polish forces out beyond a prudent limit, but it was hoped that as the army retreated it would become more concentrated. It was a weak strategy made even more feeble by Germany's enormous numerical advantages in both manpower and equipment, and by the Poles' unpreparedness for the type of pulverising mobile warfare the Germans were planning. It was also a doomed strategy in view of its reliance on French military action.

Polish troops were outnumbered two to one, and the balance was less favourable in terms of aircraft, tanks, artillery or any other index but sabres. The situation was worsened in late August by French and British diplomatic pressure to

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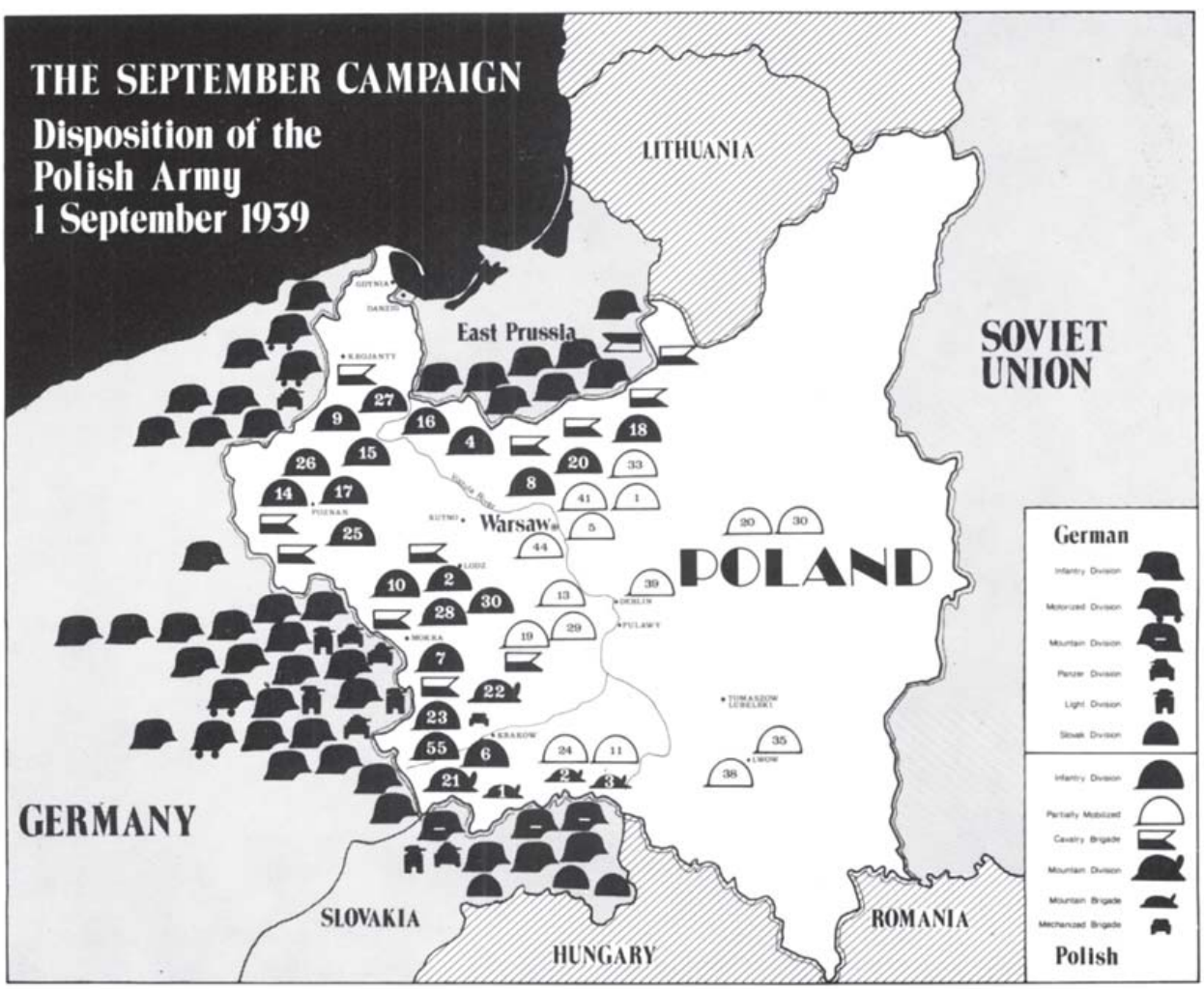
postpone mobilisation for fear of provoking the Germans. In the last week of August 1939 the Germans and Soviets signed a non-aggression pact which contained secret protocols governing the division of Poland between them. In the early morning of 1 September the Wehrmacht began its attack and started the bloodiest war in human history. The old armoured cruiser *Schleswig-Holstein* fired a salvo at the small Westerplatte garrison in the free city of Danzig (Gdansk), marking the opening of the conflict.

The September 1939 Campaign

The Polish Army was still in the throes of mobilisation when the first waves of Stukas began hitting marshalling yards, roads and communication lines. Contrary to the popular view that the Polish Air Force was destroyed on the ground during the first day, the fact is the Polish squadrons had been dispersed to special runways and survived these first strikes. While its pilots were well trained and tenacious, the Polish Air Force's P-11c fighters were a generation behind the Luftwaffe aircraft and were badly outnumbered. The Karas light bombers were something like a cross between a Lysander army co-operation plane and a Fairey Battle bomber, and were



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10th Mechanised Brigade officers confer in 1939; centre, in berets, are Col. S. Maczek and his aide F. Skibinski. Poland's only fully mechanised unit at the outbreak of war, it was known as the 'Black Brigade' from the black leather coats worn by some mechanised personnel. It was also unique in retaining the old German 1916 helmet.

largely ineffective due to the superiority of German fighters. Polish fighters and anti-aircraft batteries knocked down a surprisingly large number of German aircraft, but the Germans' control of the air was never seriously threatened except over Warsaw.

The first waves of the Wehrmacht thrust came in three main directions: in the north through the disputed Pomeranian Corridor, in the centre towards Lodz, and in the south against Krakow. Many of the initial German attacks were thrown back, but they were aggressively repeated until successful. The Wehrmacht was not yet the well-honed force it was to become, but it was certainly the most formidable army in Europe at that time.

Perhaps the most vivid image to have emerged from the September Campaign is the picture of a squadron of courageously foolhardy Polish lancers charging a wave of steel Panzers. That such attacks never occurred does not seem to have diminished the popularity of these tales, even among serious historians. The tales originated in the first days of the campaign from the pens of Italian war correspondents on the Pomeranian front. They were embellished by German propagandists, and became more fanciful with each new telling. The original source was a small skirmish near the hamlet of Krojanty on the evening of 1 September. The Pomeranian Corridor was defended by several Polish infantry divisions and the Pomeranian Cavalry Brigade. The area was indefensible, but the force was stationed there to prevent the Germans from making an unopposed seizure of the contested Corridor, as they had the Sudetenland. Upon the outbreak of war these forces were immediately to withdraw southward. Covering the retreat was Col. Mastelarz with his 18th Lancers, and a number of infantry regiments. In the early morning of 1 September, Gen. Heinz Guderian's 2nd and 20th Motorised Divisions began their drive on Polish forces in the Tuchola forest. The cavalry and infantry were able to hold them back until the early afternoon, when the Germans began to push the Poles back. By late afternoon a key rail and road junction through the forest was threatened, and Mastelarz was ordered to repulse the German thrust at all costs. Mastelarz had his own regiment, some infantry and the Brigade's tan-

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kettes at his disposal. The TK tankettes were old and worn out, and were left with a portion of the regiment to hold the existing positions. Two Lancer squadrons mounted up and began to swing around the German flank to strike them in the rear.

By early evening they had located a German infantry battalion exposed in a clearing. The squadrons were already within a few hundred yards, and a sabre charge seemed the sensible course. In moments the two squadrons had swept out of the woods and wiped out the unprepared infantry with hardly any casualties. As the troops were re-forming, a few German armoured cars equipped with automatic 20mm cannon and machine guns happened on to the scene and immediately began firing. The Poles were completely exposed, and began to gallop for cover behind a nearby hillock. Mastelarz and his immediate staff were all killed, and the losses were terrible. The grim evidence of this encounter was discovered the following day by Italian war correspondents, who were told by German soldiers that it had resulted from the cavalry having charged tanks—and so the legend began. What has escaped attention was the fact that later that evening Guderian had to step in to prevent the 2nd Motorised Division from retreating 'in the face of intense cavalry pressure'. This intense pressure came from a decimated regiment which had lost 60 per cent of its strength in the day's fighting and was not even a tenth of the size of the German unit it was pushing back.

Few battles offer more ample testimony of the nerve and heroism of the Polish cavalry than the battle at Mokra on 1 September. It was one of the few battles where an entire cavalry brigade fought together, but it is more remarkable as one of the few headlong clashes between an entire Panzer division and a cavalry brigade. On the morning of 1 September the Wolynian Cavalry Brigade under the command of Col. Julian Filipowicz had three of its four regiments in the fields around the scattered hamlets that made up Mokra. The fourth regiment was still in transit. The Brigade had less than half the manpower of the 4th Panzer Division, which was massing across the border nearby, and incomparably less in firepower. The Brigade's anti-tank arsenal consisted of a paltry 18 Bofors 37mm anti-tank guns, about 60 anti-tank rifles and 16 old Czarist Putilov three-inchers which had been rerifled to fire French 75mm ammunition. The Germans had 295 tanks, about 50 armoured cars, and well over double the firepower in supporting artillery.

Signals units, whose collar patches were black with cornflower blue scalloped rear edge piping, used Alsatians and other dogs to tow small cable-reel trailers.

The cavalrymen were badly stretched out, with their horses left about a kilometre behind. Like over 90 per cent of Polish cavalry actions in 1939, this battle was to be fought on foot. Several German tank patrols slipped through gaps in the Polish line, and by early morning an attack was brewing right in the middle of the Brigade. The tanks ran headlong into the Brigade's horse artillery troop and, outdated or not, the old '75's smashed the first attack; a few crippled stragglers returned to German lines. A mounted patrol sent out to report on German activity stumbled into an advancing German column. The patrol abandoned its horses and took cover in a nearby clump of buildings; it was besieged for the entire day, and only a handful of survivors managed to escape at nightfall. In the meantime the first wave had struck the cavalry's line of shallow entrenchments.

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A platoon of infantry from 10th Mechanised Brigade, here wearing the forage cap rather than the helmet. They are riding in an Ursus truck which has been fitted with an anti-aircraft mounting for the 'ckm wz.30', a licence-built Polish version of the US Browning .30cal. water-cooled machine gun.

With so few anti-tank weapons, the troopers resorted to improvised attempts to disable the tanks, particularly grenades. The first attack was rebuffed, as was every subsequent attack that morning, but Polish losses were mounting alarmingly. The Germans lost over 30 tanks and armoured cars in the morning attacks, and by the afternoon had changed their tactics. The next attack was preceded by heavy artillery, and the tanks were accompanied by infantry. This attack came very close to breaking through Polish lines. The situation grew so desperate that the Brigade commander could be seen bringing ammunition to the precious Bofors anti-tank guns. A charge by the Brigade's tankettes accomplished little, but artillery support from the armoured train *Smialy* located behind Polish positions across the river finally helped rout the Panzer attack. By dusk the fields around the Polish positions glowed with the smouldering wrecks and abandoned carcasses of German tanks, trucks and armoured cars. While Polish claims of 75 tanks and 75 other vehicles are probably exaggerated, the 4th Panzer Division had been given a bloody drubbing. Polish losses had been equally serious, especially to the supply train and horses, which had been attacked by Stukas. The Brigade succeeded in holding back the 4th Panzer Division the following day as well, but was forced to withdraw on 3 September when the infantry division on its northern flank was hurled back by the 1st Panzer Division.

For the Polish Army as a whole the situation resembled what had happened in the fields of Mokra. The initial attacks had been held, but at a serious cost, and the Polish divisions were obliged to withdraw. More ominously, Polish plans to withdraw their forces and regroup them in new defensive positions had gone completely awry. The attacks by the Luftwaffe made daytime troop movement impossible. Infantry units fought by day, moved by night and faced the next day's battle thoroughly exhausted. Reinforcements had an impossible time moving forward as the roads were clogged by fleeing civilians. The large German minority in the border areas was pro-Nazi, and engaged in sniping and fifth column activities.

By 3 September, Guderian's forces had sliced through the Pomeranian Corridor and were poised to strike southward through weak Polish positions towards the capital itself. The battered Polish lines had developed cracks with no available reserves to fill them. Contact between High Command in Warsaw and the field staffs was at a snail's pace or non-existent. France and Britain entered the conflict, but this was of little immediate solace. The dam burst: German mechanised columns plunged deep into Polish lines, and on 7 September the tanks of the 4th Panzer Division began appearing outside the suburbs of Warsaw. They began immediately to make attempts to break into the city itself, but showed little judgement, and on 9 September alone the Poles claimed 57 tanks from the 4th Panzer Division in intense street fighting.

The second week of the war went just as badly. As Gen. Smigly-Rydz was both the commander-in-chief and head of state, the government felt obliged to abandon the capital rather than fall into German hands. They proceeded to the Rumanian border, where orders were issued to rally forces around them for a defence in the so-called Rumanian bridgehead. It was an unfortunate decision as communications from the frontier were exceedingly poor, and it robbed the Polish Army of what little central control was left. The only bright spot was Gen. Tadeusz Kutrzeba's Army Poznan. This battlegroup had been bypassed by the Wehrmacht and withdrew

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in good order to the area around Kutno, picking up stragglers along the way. It posed a serious threat to the unprotected flank of the German 8th Army, and on 9 September began to launch attacks across the Bzura River southward against the unprepared 30th Infantry Division. The Bzura counter-offensive caught the Germans completely by surprise and would cost the German commander, Gen. J. Blaskowitz, his marshal's baton. It forced the Germans to slow the pace of the attacks on Warsaw and to divert a considerable number of troops away from their eastwards drive. The fighting lasted over a week, by which time the eight Polish infantry divisions involved were completely surrounded. In savage fighting some Polish cavalry and infantry escaped the trap and battled their way into Warsaw.

The French counter-offensive was expected on or about 17 September. Instead, reports began to arrive from border posts on the eastern frontier that the Red Army was invading. The secret clauses of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact came into effect, and the Soviet Union joined the war to claim its spoils. There were few Polish troops in the immediate path of the Red Army, but the uncontested drive threatened to cut off tens of thousands of troops fighting their way southward into the Rumanian bridgehead. On 18 September the Polish government crossed the Rumanian border after ordering remaining units of the Polish Army to do the same in anticipation of re-forming the army in France. While many historians of the war seem to feel that the campaign was substantially over by this date, nothing is further from the truth. Some of the most savage fighting of the campaign ensued as Polish troops fought their way south from the Lublin area. The greatest tank-vs-tank battle of the war was fought during these encounters near Tomaszow Lubelski. Casualties in the German Army Group South, which had fought in the Bzura River battles and at Warsaw, were higher in the period after 18 September than in the whole period before. Nevertheless the combined weight of the Wehrmacht and the Red Army made the fighting hopeless. The city of Lwow, which had repulsed repeated German attacks, finally surrendered to the Soviets. Warsaw continued to hold out despite daily Luftwaffe attacks and mounting civilian losses. On 27 September, wishing to see no more needless civilian casualties, the heroic mayor of the city, Stefan Starzynski, announced its capitulation. The small garrison on the Hel peninsula in the Baltic continued to hold out until 1 October. On the day of the German victory parade in Warsaw fighting still raged around Kock in eastern Poland between Operational Group Polesie and the German 13th and 29th Motorised Infantry Divisions. The fighting there did not cease until 5 October.

Captain of the 1st Light Tank Bn. conferring with a tank commander. The officer wears the black leather tanker's coat while the two enlisted men wear khaki overalls. The small satchel slung on the chest is for the Polish WSR wz.32 gasmask which replaced the older French pattern. The black beret replaced the forage cap for armoured troops.

While the Polish general staff was not overly optimistic at the beginning of the war, no one had expected the campaign to end so abruptly, or with such a humiliating defeat. The Poles had underestimated the Wehrmacht and put too much faith in the French and in their own impoverished and outdated army. The intervention of the Soviet Army accelerated the inevitable and shortened the war by a few weeks. It reduced the number of Polish troops escaping into Rumania and Hungary and made any prolonged defence of the Rumanian bridgehead impossible. Still, there could be little criticism of the determination and bravery of the Polish soldier. Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt, who commanded Army Group South in 1939, wrote: 'The Polish cavalry attacked heroically; in general the bravery and heroism of the Polish Army merits great respect. But the higher command was not equal to the demands of the situation.'

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The Polish Army in Exile

France, 1940

There was never any question that the struggle must continue. Before Warsaw surrendered, plans were already being laid for the underground resistance, and other orders were issued calling on Polish troops to escape to France. The Poles of this generation had been nurtured since infancy on heroic tales of past wars and insurrections. Calamity was no stranger to Poland. Every insurrection of the 19th century had been savagely suppressed, but with each generation came yet another bloody grasp for national freedom. There was ample historic precedent for an army-in-exile. Polish troops had flocked in thousands to Napoleon's banner in the vain hope the victorious French would place Poland back on Europe's map. In the First World War Polish troops again fought alongside the French, and were finally rewarded for their efforts. In 1939 there was the additional need to redeem themselves in the eyes of the French and in their own eyes. They realised that Poland's fate was inextricably bound to the goodwill of France and Britain. They had little doubt that the French and British would win this war and they felt it important that the French government realised that it was through no lack of courage or determination that the September débâcle had occurred.

The task of moving tens of thousands of Polish troops from Rumania and Hungary to France proved more difficult than expected. The German government put great pressure on the Rumanians and Hungarians to intern the Poles for the duration of the war, and this pressure could not be

A company of TKS tankettes await orders near Warsaw, 13 September 1939. The crews wear the usual khaki overalls with the French-derived tanker's helmet. Poland's most numerous armoured vehicle in 1939, the TKS mounted only a single Hotchkiss machine gun.

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A fire control detachment for a battery of 75mm wz.36 AA guns awaits another Luftwaffe raid on Warsaw, 2 September 1939. The crew wears khaki overalls, and the wz.31 steel helmet back to front, for ease of operating optical instruments. The tunic collar patches of the officer (centre) are green with a yellow-piped scalloped rear edge, and the silver zig-zag.

overlooked. However, relations with the Hungarians and Rumanians had always been good, and both countries saw their own worst fears realised in the fate of the Poles. Internment camps were set up, but the Poles began escaping by the shipload under consciously lax supervision.

Many of the officials of the pre-war regime, including Smigly-Rydz, were interned and not allowed to leave for France. Polish officials in France began the task of forming an exile government from what remained. It was just as well that the pre-war leaders did not make it to France, as they were blamed by their soldiers for the defeat in 1939. This factor, plus French diplomatic pressure, led to the appointment of General Wladyslaw Sikorski (pronounced Vwa-di'-swaf Shi-kor'-ski) as the head of both the reconstituted government and the army. It was a most fortunate choice. Sikorski had an admirable war record from 1920, but had fallen out of grace with the 'colonels' regime' and played no part in the 1939 defeat. He was aligned with small opposition centrist parties, which made him politically acceptable to both left and right. Moreover, he was an ardent francophile and well liked and respected by the French government.

After some negotiation the French agreed to help form a separate Polish Army on their soil. The French were somewhat embarrassed by their inactivity in September, but there was widespread feeling that the Poles were incompetent and that such an endeavour was a waste of time and effort, and would be unduly complicated on the field of battle. Nevertheless, the more French strategists studied the campaign, the more muted their criticisms of the Poles became. They agreed to form four infantry divisions, in keeping with the then-prevalent notion of the quality of Slav in-

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Men of the 1st Grenadier Div., during ceremonies marking the presentation of a new regimental standard by the city of Arras, France. Note standard French uniforms and equipment of the day, and Lebel 1886/93 rifles. (Left) is a corporal, his two shoulder strap stripes just visible; (centre) is a sergeant.

fantry. These units would be formed from the 35,000 troops who had escaped from Poland, as well as a further 45,000 Polish conscripts recruited from the large Polish immigrant communities in France. In spite of these accords, the Poles spent the autumn and early winter of 1939–40 rotting away in French camps, with only a token issue of old horizon blue uniforms and a motley collection of firearms which were obsolete even by Poland's generous standards.

Events soon began to move at a faster pace. Russia invaded Finland, and France and Britain decided to intervene on the side of the stalwart Finns. Sikorski offered the services of Polish troops, who were happy to take a crack at the Red Army for its stab in the back. In January 1940 the French began providing equipment for the 1st Independent Polish *Podhale* (Highland) Brigade. Before this and other Allied units were ready Finland capitulated. Spring approached, and the Poles coaxed the French into providing more equipment. Two divisions were nearing readiness, the 1st Grenadier Division and the 2nd Rifle Division. The French also began to provide equipment, including two battalions of R-35 tanks, to reconstitute the 10th Mechanised Cavalry Brigade. The 10th Mechanised, popularly called the Black Brigade due to its unique black coats, was Poland's only fully mechanised brigade in 1939, and had fought brilliantly. The unit was commanded by Colonel Stanislaw Maczek (pronounced Sta-ni'-swaf Machek) and, due to the fact that it was fighting near the Rumanian frontier, had escaped nearly intact to France.

By the outbreak of the battle of France in May the first two divisions were nearly ready with two more, the 3rd and 4th, still in training. The Highland Brigade was the first to see combat. In late April, under the command of Gen. Zygmunt Bohusz-Szyszko (Bo'-hush Shish'-ko), it sailed with French Chasseurs Alpin brigades to Ankenes in Norway. Its first actions began on 14 May with attacks on German hilltop redoubts overlooking the village. The French came to put great trust in the Poles during the grim and bloody hill fighting. Due to the invasion of the Low Countries on 10 May, the Norwegian Expeditionary Force began to pull out on 26 May. The Polish Highland Brigade was landed at Brest on 14 June and was soon overwhelmed in intense fighting on the Bretagne peninsula.

Ironically, the 1st Grenadier Division was stationed in the little Saar pocket which the French had wrested from Germany in 1939 as a propaganda gesture to assuage their conscience for abandoning the Poles. The 2nd Rifle Division was stationed near Belfort on the Swiss border. The French Army was desperate for tank units and called up Maczek's 10th Mechanised Brigade even though it was only partly formed. The 1st Grenadiers did not see combat until late in the campaign, when they were assigned as a rearguard during the retreat of the French 20th Army Corps. The division's commander, Gen. Duch (pronounced Duk) was placed in a very awkward position when in mid-June, with France on the brink of collapse, Sikorski ordered all Polish troops to escape to Britain. To avoid any future recriminations Duch decided to remain defending the French. It was a costly decision: during the successful holding action of 17 to 21 June the Division lost 45 per cent of its men. When finally surrounded, Duch ordered the survivors to escape to Britain as best they could, but few succeeded.

The 2nd Rifle Division saw little action, and on 17 June accompanied the French 45th Army

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Corps across the border into Switzerland, where it was interned until 1945. The 3rd Division, though only partly formed and trained, was thrown into the disastrous Bretagne fighting, where it was eventually overwhelmed. The 4th Division was never committed to combat and was evacuated from the Bay of Biscay to Britain. Maczek's tankers took part in some of the most intense fighting of the campaign during the retreat of the 7th Army Corps towards Dijon in Champagne. The Brigade was joined by a Senegalese unit, and this combination must have been quite a sight for friend and foe alike. By 19 June the Brigade had lost 75 per cent of its troops and all of its tanks. Maczek ordered the survivors to make another attempt at escape.

Two men of a signals unit attached to the Polish Independent Highland Rifle Bde. rest on a hilltop near Borkenes, Norway. Their uniforms are standard French infantry campaign issue, rather than the more elaborate cape and motorcycle jacket worn by some units of the brigade. The painted helmet eagle, dull off-white, is hardly visible.

The Phoenix Rises

In less than a year the Polish Army had endured a second demoralising débâcle. Their illusions about the invincibility of the French Army and their hopes for a quick and victorious return to their homeland were cruelly shattered. In the defeat the Army had been decimated once again. Of the 75,000 troops in France about 19,000 were evacuated to Britain, and of these a quarter were Air Force crews. Besides these troops Kopanski's fledgling Carpathian Brigade, forming in the Levant, moved to Palestine to avoid internment by the new Vichy regime. Relations between the Poles and the British were not as cordial as they had been with the French, but in the gloomy summer of 1940 they shared the same lonely fate. Churchill was sympathetic to Sikorski's request to re-form the Polish Army on an autonomous basis, and the gypsy soldiers now found themselves encamped in the environs of Glasgow. Apart from coastal defence and training there was little for the Poles to do. At first the RAF was reluctant to allow Polish pilots into fighter squadrons, but in desperation several Polish squadrons were formed and sent into action in August 1940. The Polish 303 Squadron became the highest scoring RAF unit during the Battle of Britain. The Poles may have flown obsolete aircraft in 1939, but their training was rigorous and they were far more experienced than the raw recruits flying Spitfires and Hurricanes in 1940. The smashing success of the Polish pilots in 1940 warmed relations between the two allies, and more vigorous efforts were undertaken to re-equip and reorganise their units. The British came to appreciate that the Poles were the most determined of the émigré forces stationed in the United Kingdom, and their original sarcastic and demeaning judgements of the Polish struggle in 1939 were soon forgotten. The performance of the antiquated Polish Army in 1939 appeared far more creditable in the light of the humiliating performance of the well-equipped British and French armies in 1940. The main stumbling block for the Poles in 1940 and 1941 was the paucity of manpower. There was a steady trickle of volunteers from the Continent, who often literally walked from Poland to various neutral ports, but it was still necessary to use trained officers or diplomatic staff in the ranks to bring some units up to strength.

The 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union was greeted with considerable joy by the British and Poles alike. England welcomed a new and important ally in their lonely war against Hitler. The Poles could ill conceal their pleasure at the trouncing the Red Army was taking at the hands of the Germans. It was sweet revenge for their collusion with the Nazis in 1939, and they hoped that the Germans and Russians would pulverise

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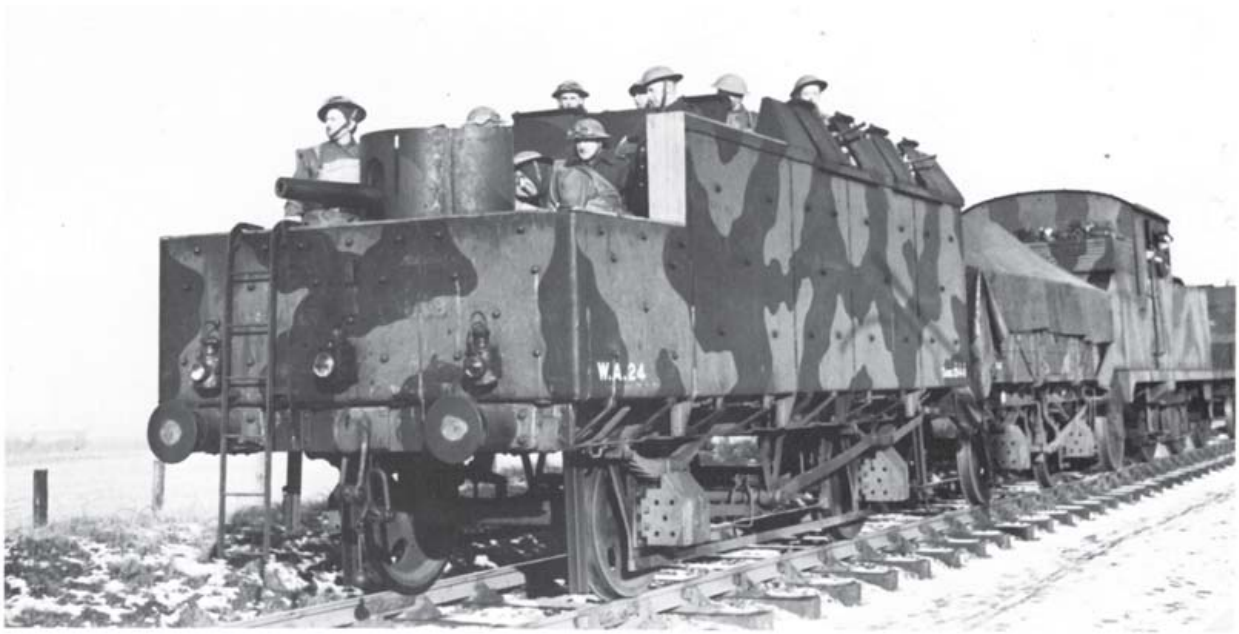

Among the tasks undertaken by Polish troops in Britain after the fall of France was the crewing—in at least some cases, by units composed entirely of 'surplus' officers—of 12 armoured trains guarding the British coast against invasion.

each other as they had in 1914–17, thus freeing Poland from their depredations. The British government was not happy with these sentiments as they expected the Poles to put past grievances behind them and re-establish diplomatic relations with Stalin. The Sikorski government did its best to comply, and a pact was signed in 1941. However, Stalin was unwilling to repudiate the seizure of Polish territory in 1939 and this immediately put great strains on the relations between these strange allies.

The most direct benefit of the pact was that it allowed the formation of additional Polish Army units on Soviet soil from the 200,000 Polish prisoners of war in Soviet camps. The units were under the command of Gen. Wladyslaw Anders (pronounced Vwa-di'-swaf Anders), a former cavalry officer. These units soon proved to be another bone of contention between the Poles and the Soviets. The Polish prisoners had been brutally treated and the survivors were undernourished and ill-clothed. Efforts were made to re-organise the men into a fighting force, but these attempts were hampered by a lack of supplies and equipment and the absence of a large proportion of the officers captured in 1939. Governmental enquiries about the officers led nowhere. The Soviets desired a symbolic presence of Polish troops at the front as soon as possible, but the Poles were reluctant to dispatch a single ill-prepared division, knowing it would achieve little but the speedy death of the men involved. The Soviets insisted that a division be ready by October 1941, but by this time the men of the new 5th Kresowa Division were still in rags and 40 per cent were barefoot. It was one thing for politicians in London and Moscow to talk about the need for Allied unity and forgiveness, and another thing to ask half-starved soldiers to sacrifice their lives for a foreign state which had only recently mistreated them and even now would not recognise their right to the land their ancestors had tilled for a millennium. Anders, who had been tortured by the NKVD[1], shared their sentiments and refused to send any troops into action, citing the lack of equipment.

After discussions, the Soviets admitted they could not adequately equip all of the Polish troops and agreed to transfer some of them to Britain and Iran, where they could more easily be supplied. Relations became increasingly bitter as the Poles accused the Soviets of interfering with their recruitment drives and not providing adequate supplies. Stalin refused to allow the Poles to

[1] Soviet security police.

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recruit Ukrainians, Byelorussians or Jews who had been Polish citizens in 1939 but who had lived in the disputed eastern half of the country claimed by the Soviet Union. The situation was getting out of hand, and in 1942 American and British diplomats intervened and convinced Stalin to allow the evacuation of the Polish troops to the Middle East, which would free six Soviet divisions stationed in Iran from occupation duties alongside the British. They argued that they could more easily be equipped there, and go on to fight the Germans, even if not on the Eastern Front. By this time the Soviets were fed up with the Poles and had begun to accuse them of being unwilling to fight the Germans. Soviet officials remained oblivious to Polish resentments over their brutal imprisonment or the Nazi-Soviet collusion of 1939, and were unwilling even to consider making token concessions on the territorial question, such as leaving the Poles their precious city of Lwow. By the spring of 1943, 115,000 soldiers and some of their families had been evacuated. This was only a small fraction of the one and a half million Poles in camps in the Soviet Union at the time, either as ex-prisoners of war, or victims of deportations from the contested eastern territories during the de-Polonisation drive conducted by the NKVD in 1940–41.

The Polish troops arrived in the Middle East just as Soviet-Polish relations ruptured. German troops near a small town called Katyn uncovered the graves of 4,000 Polish officers. While the Poles realised that both the Nazis and the Soviets were capable of such an atrocity, they were especially suspicious of the Soviets due to their unwillingness to disclose the whereabouts of 15,000 Polish officers captured by the Red Army in 1939. If they had fallen into German hands in 1941, why did the Soviets not simply announce the fact? The Poles requested an investigation by the International Red Cross. The Soviet government used this as a pretext to break off diplomatic relations and accused the Poles of complicity with the Nazis. The Russians demanded that the post-war Polish government be 'friendly' to the Soviet Union, which meant that it should be politically restructured to suit Stalin's taste. As a gesture of its friendship, the Soviet Union expected the Sikorski government to accede to the annexation

A Polish sergeant serving with British Anti-Aircraft Command prepares a round for a 3.7in. AA gun, and displays the detail changes made by the Poles to British uniform. The shoulder straps of the battledress blouse are khaki with silver or white embroidery thinly outlined in red, indicating this rank. The white-on-crimson national title appears at the top of both sleeves above the black-on-red AA Command patch. The collar bears patches in Polish branch colours—green with yellow trim for an AA unit. British-based Polish units painted the helmet eagle in yellow.

of half of pre-war Polish territory in exchange for a lesser amount of land to be taken from Germany at the conclusion of the war. Both the Churchill and Roosevelt administrations came to accept these demands, and eventually endorsed them at Teheran and Yalta. American and British foreign policy was dominated by a desire to placate Stalin since at the time the Red Army was bearing the brunt of the land war. Popular opinion in Britain and the United States was decidely pro-Soviet, and the Polish position was ridiculed as the pig-headed stubbornness of a clique of unrealistic landed aristocrats whose minds were clouded by blind anti-Bolshevism and tainted by anti-Semitism as well. It was an unfair view, which many Americans and British would come to regret as their own naive concept of the Soviet paradise crumbled in the face of the revealed horrors of Stalinism. The breakdown in relations between the Polish government and Stalin was a tragedy which inevitably led the Soviets to form a puppet counter-government in Moscow; this would eventually form its own army to fight

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alongside the Red Army in place of Anders' forces.

While this acrimonious debate raged, the Polish Army again returned to the battlefield, if only in a small way. In September 1941 the Carpathian Brigade under Gen. Stanislaw Kopanski (pronounced Sta-ni'-swaf Ko-pine'-ski) was shipped from its training grounds in Egypt to take part in the defence of Tobruk. The Brigade had been formed in Syria in 1939 from Polish soldiers escaping through the Balkans; since the fall of France the unit had been serving with the British Army.

The Brigade consisted of three battalions of infantry and a mounted cavalry regiment (in fact of battalion strength). The Brigade fought along the western perimeter of Tobruk, and during the December break-out pushed past the Italian Brescia Division in the battle for the 'White Knoll' and captured Acroma. The Brigade fought alongside the New Zealanders in the battle of Gazala, and was eventually withdrawn to Palestine in early 1942 to begin the task of training and equipping the soldiers being evacuated from the Soviet Union.

In June 1943, Gen. Sikorski was killed in a plane crash off Gibraltar. It was an especially tragic loss as Sikorski was one of the few Poles admired and trusted both by his own government and by the United States and Britain. There was no other leader of his stature or skills to take over. Command of the army passed to Gen. Kazimierz Sosnkowski (pronounced Ka-zhi'-myesh Sosenkof'-ski), and Stanislaw Mikolajczyk (Sta-ni'-swaf Miko-why'chik) became Prime Minister of the government-in-exile.

Gen. W. Sikorski, leader of the Polish Government-in-Exile, decorates two privates after field exercises in Scotland, 1941. The general wears the traditional 'rogatywka' or garrison cap, with three stars and the silver-embroidered zig-zag around the band indicating his rank. The stars and a short zig-zag are repeated on the tunic shoulder straps; general officers' collar patches are also visible, dark blue velvet edged at the top with carmine red and bearing silver eagles. The two soldiers wear French Mle.1935 motorised troops' helmets, issued to Polish troops in Britain until replaced by British helmets, and used mainly in reconnaissance units.

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The Polish 2nd Corps in Italy, 1944–45

Anders' refugee army set up camp in Palestine, Iraq and Iran. These troops were used to form the Polish 2nd Corps and to reinforce the existing Polish 1st Corps in Scotland. There was no prospect of their early return to combat, as they were malaria-ridden, poorly clothed and ill-fed. Training lasted from the autumn of 1942 to the autumn of 1943. During this training period the Polish forces served in a British counter-intelligence deception aimed at convincing the Germans that a major invasion was soon to take place in the Balkans. The Poles themselves hoped that there was an element of truth in these plans, as they would have liked nothing better than to be landed in Greece or Yugoslavia as part of an Allied force to liberate Poland and Central Europe before the Russians arrived. Such a plan was ruled out in 1943 as risky and impractical.

The three major units of the Polish 2nd Corps were the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division, formed around Kopanski's veterans from the Tobruk fighting; the 5th Kresowa Infantry Division, raised in Iraq and Egypt; and the 2nd Independent Armoured Brigade, which in 1945 was expanded to form the 2nd Warsaw Armoured Division. Beginning in September 1943, the 2nd Corps was moved to Italy and took up positions on the Sangro River line. Its activities were limited to occasional patrols as the British 8th Army did not want the Germans to learn that reinforcements were being brought in for a spring offensive on Rome. In May 1944 the 2nd Corps was in position to participate in the fourth battle for Monte Cassino. The Poles were given the difficult task of taking the monastery itself. The three previous attacks had been bloody failures; the monastery was situated high in the rocky hills and made an ideal defensive position for the crack troops of the Luftwaffe's 1st Parachute Division. In contrast to the previous attempts, this offensive was to be launched against the whole length of the Gustav Line and would combine the efforts of both the British 8th Army and the American 5th Army. The British XIII Corps commanded by Lt. Gen. Oliver Leese would swing into the Liri River valley behind the monastery, aiming to force the Germans to abandon their positions on the hill.

Men of the Independent Carpathian Rifle Bde. scan the sky for German aircraft during the siege of Tobruk. British clothing and equipment were worn, differenced by rank insignia and—in some cases—a painted national eagle on the helmet, on a red oval or shield background. Shoulder stripes indicate a corporal (left).

In the early morning of 12 May 1944, following a two-and-a-half-hour bombardment, the Kresowa infantry attacked towards San Angelo and the Carpathian Rifles towards the infamous Hill 593. The artillery proved less effective than hoped for, and Polish losses soon mounted. The Carpathian Rifles gained a tenuous grip on Hill 593, but in a few hours' fighting had already lost 20 per cent of their strength. Anders called his bloodied units back to their start lines in the evening. Although no ground had been gained Gen. Leese complimented the Poles, noting that without their sacrifices the British drive across the Rapido River into the valley below would not have succeeded. Polish 2nd Corps drew away reserves and artillery that would otherwise have been directed against XIII Corps. On 16 May, XIII Corps nearly had the monastery cut off, and on 17 May the Poles joined the fray again with the support of Sherman tanks from the Polish 2nd Armoured Brigade. By nightfall they had a weak grip on Hill 593 overlooking the monastery. That night most of the surviving German paratroopers began to retreat to avoid being captured, and on 18 May the Poles brushed past their rearguards and the 12th Podolski Lancers raised the red and white national flag over the Monte Cassino monastery.

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Mounted troops of the 5th Infantry Division (from June 1943, 'Kresowa') parade at Saratov, USSR, December 1941. Subsequently evacuated to the Middle East, this formation fought at Cassino. The horses are *panje* steppe ponies, and the uniforms a mixture of Polish greatcoats and caps with various Russian items.

In the week's fighting the 2nd Corps had suffered appalling losses; there were 4,199 casualties, 25 per cent of these dead. This amounted to about 25 per cent of the total strength of 2nd Corps' two infantry divisions.

Following the Cassino battle, the 2nd Corps took part in the drive up the Adriatic Coast, capturing Ancona on 20 July 1944 and Bologna in April 1945. The 2nd Corps was almost withdrawn from the Senio-Bologna fighting as news of the Yalta accords spread. It was becoming clear that the American and British governments had acceded to Soviet territorial demands. As many of the soldiers of 2nd Corps came from the contested eastern provinces, bitter rage swept the divisions. Their sacrifices and suffering through five years of war seemed all for nothing. Honouring their commitments, they took part in the final phases of the Italian campaign, but with a heavy heart. Like the Dombrowski Legion, which had fought in Italy during the Napoleanic Wars, they would not know the joy of marching back into their homeland.

The 1st Corps in N.W. Europe, 1944–45

The Polish 1st Corps was smaller in size than the 2nd Corps and its major combat units consisted of the 1st Polish Armoured Division, raised around the nucleus of Gen. Maczek's 10th Mechanised Brigade, and the independent Parachute Brigade commanded by Gen. Stanislaw Sosabowski (pronounced Sta-ni'-swaf Sosa-bof'-ski). The 1st Corps had also raised and trained commando teams which had been dropped into occupied France and Poland to serve with partisan groups.

The 1st Polish Armoured Division served with the Canadian 2nd Corps as part of 21 Army Group. It landed in Normandy and on 8 August 1944 took part in the great tank battles during the Caen breakout. It was the lead element of the 21 Army Group and raced ahead of the combined British and Canadian force, bypassing Falaise and nearly completing the encirclement of the German forces in Normandy by seizing the Chambois road junction and Hill 262 nearby. Trapped in the Falaise pocket by the Poles, Canadians and British to the north, and the Americans to the south, the Germans made furious attempts to break through and escape. The isolated Polish positions were soon awash in a sea of retreating German units and were nearly overwhelmed. The positions on Mount Ormel were the scene of some of the worst fighting, with successive waves of Germans attacking in a suicidal frenzy. Finally the Poles were able to link up with the Americans to the south and with their own Corps to the north. The gap was finally sealed, and it was little wonder that the area became known as the 'killing ground'. The roads were tightly packed with German transport, both wheeled and horse-drawn, and the columns were mercilessly attacked by fighter-bombers and artillery. The Poles had suffered heavy losses, about 2,000 casualties, or 20 per cent of their strength, and over 100 tanks—about 40 per cent of their original force.

As a curious aside to the battle, among the tens of thousands of German troops captured in the

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pocket there were several thousand Polish conscripts who gladly exchanged their field grey for Polish uniforms. In a rather unusual fashion, the 1st Polish Armoured Division was able to make good its losses! The battle of the Falaise Gap was unquestionably the key factor in speeding the drive across France; German losses in the battle, especially in terms of materiel, were irreparable. The Polish rôle was a major one: as Montgomery said, the Allies caught the Germans in a bottle, and the Poles were the cork.

After the frantic and bloody battle of Falaise the rest of the campaign was somewhat anticlimactic for the Poles. After a brief respite to make good the heavy losses suffered at Falaise the 1st Armoured Division took part in the drive into Holland, operating in the St Niklaas area during the attack on the Axel-Hulst Canal. It took part in the liberation of dozens of Dutch towns and cities, most notably Breda and Moerdijk. Its final act was the capture of the German port of Wilhelmshaven.

The Polish 1st Corps never fought as a single formation in combat. The other major component of the Corps, the 1st Independent Parachute Brigade, was formed in England but was originally intended for use in support of the Polish Underground during its uprising. In the summer of 1944, before the uprising had occurred, the British insisted that the Brigade be used to support operations in Western Europe, and the Poles had little choice but to accept. The British felt that they would be unable to support the Brigade once it had been dropped into Poland, and were very wary of the risks of such an operation. The Brigade was committed to a number of drops after the Normandy invasion, but each was cancelled, and the unit was finally chosen to drop during Operation 'Market-Garden' in September 1944.

The plans called for the Brigade to be dropped on D + 2 to support the British 1st Airborne Division, which was assigned to seize the bridge at Arnhem. The Polish commander, Gen. Sosabowski, was aghast when informed of the details of the British drop and felt that this aspect of 'Market-Garden' was too hastily planned and badly conceived. Against these anxieties there was the pressure of his government and of his men, who had trained long and hard and for whom the Arnhem drop might be their only opportunity to enter combat. The Brigade's drop was postponed three days due to poor weather. Urquhart's 1st Airborne Division had been very roughly handled when they landed at Arnhem, they had failed to take their objective and did not have control of the drop zones. More critical for the Poles' fate, they were not in radio contact with Allied units outside Arnhem due to radio problems, and so were unable to inform the RAF of the perilous condition of the drop zones. The Poles dropped across the river from the 1st Airborne Division, right on top of German patrols. Many of the Polish paratroopers were killed as they floated towards the ground, and they soon had to fight for their drop zone. Despite several costly attempts they were unable to send many troops to reinforce Urquhart's force, and on 25 September the gallant survivors of the 1st Airborne Division were helped to escape across the river. In the fighting the Poles lost 590 men, or over 25 per cent of their force.

3in. mortar crew of 3rd Carpathian Rifle Div. photographed near Mt Croce, 11 March 1944. Note the divisional patch, which was often removed in the front line: halved white over red, with a green pine tree superimposed. The battledress and equipment are standard British issue.

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Near Montenero, 3 March 1944: Universal carriers of 3rd Pltn., HQ Coy., 3rd Bn., 1st Bde., 3rd Carpathian Rifle Div. advance with caution. The platoon commander carries a Thompson, though apparently not with enough tension to disturb the ash on his cigarette! The lead carrier mounts the .55 Boys AT rifle.

At the conclusion of the war, the Polish Army in the West numbered some quarter of a million soldiers. Besides the units which had seen combat there were a number of new divisions and tank brigades ready to go into action had the war continued. The Polish Army was more than a symbolic force, as was the case with most of the émigré contingents. It fought in many of the major campaigns of the war, and to draw attention to their contributions the Poles often chose some of the toughest assignments. The Polish contribution is all the more remarkable in view of the epic journeys many of the soldiers undertook to escape from occupied Poland to serve in the exile army. In the end their sacrifices were largely in vain. By 1945 it was clear that the United States and Britain had ceded half of pre-war Poland to the Soviet Union in exchange for a smaller amount of land to be taken from Germany. They had agreed to the formation of a sham coalition government which fronted for a Communist takeover. As the Soviet Union would never consider allowing the Polish divisions to return as a whole to Poland, the units remained together until 1947, when it was evident that their further existence would be futile. The new Communist government of Poland offered to allow individual Polish soldiers to return, but only a fraction did so. After five years on foreign soil some soldiers could not bear to be parted from their families and country any longer, and returned in spite of their misgivings. Many of these unfortunate men ended up in prison camps, from which most were not freed until 1956. The larger portion of the soldiers settled in Britain, but there is hardly a major city in all of North and South America and Australia without its own small community of Polish Army veterans.

The Underground Army

The history of the many separate Resistance groups active in Poland during the German occupation is extremely complex. For reasons of space, only the briefest notes are possible in this book.

Resistance in Poland was immediate, and inevitable. Not only did it reflect deeply seated national traditions, but it was further provoked by the stupid brutality of the occupation authorities. The German programme, openly pursued, called for the extermination of the large Jewish community and all Polish leaders and intelligentsia, and massive deportations of slave labourers

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drawn from the rest of the population. (In all some one and a half million Poles—more than seven per cent of the population—would be deported, not including PoWs and Jews.) From 1940 the whole Jewish community was crowded into urban ghettos where hundreds of thousands died, and from 1942 the survivors were deported to death camps.

Despite natural anti-Soviet feeling, Poland was one of the few occupied countries which did not contribute a volunteer Waffen-SS unit to the Eastern Front; and the Germans were unable to form a collaborationist government. The brutality of the German regime far exceeded anything seen in the Western European nations. Resistance met with massive reprisals, with ten Poles being executed for every German killed; massacres of whole communities, on the scale of the Lidice atrocity, were numerous. The death penalty was rigidly enforced for giving any help to Jews, and hundreds of Poles perished for this 'crime'. In all some three million Jews and three million other Polish citizens had been butchered by the end of the war.

The occupation of the Soviet zone was different but no less cruel. Some 1,200,000 Poles—mainly drawn from among civic leaders, military veterans, clergy, and the educated middle class—were deported to labour camps. The Soviet NKVD, more experienced and subtle than the brutal Gestapo and the corrupt German civil administration, posed a far greater threat to the Resistance.

By 1943 most Resistance groups of all political colours were organised under the AK or Home Army, some 300,000 strong, and supporting the Sikorski government. (Two groups which remained aloof were the ultra-nationalist NSZ, and the weak Communist GL movements.) The AK's strategy in 1939–43 was to avoid unlimited guerilla warfare, building up strength for major operations when the Wehrmacht appeared to be crumbling. Unlike, for instance, the Titoist partisans in Yugoslavia, the AK had to operate in a flat, generally open country with few natural refuges, a country whose major rail arteries to the Russian Front made it a vital and massively occupied German staging area. Even so, the level of AK activity deemed necessary still far out-

A patrol from the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Div. occupies a shell hole beside a knocked-out 'StuG M42 mit 75/34 851(i)'—a German-operated Italian SP gun—near Castel Bolognese, 13 February 1945. Below the national shoulder titles the British 8th Army patch can be seen on the right sleeve and, in the original print, the divisional patch on the left.

reached that of most Western underground groups. Average German monthly troop losses to Polish partisans were 250 320 in 1942, and 850 1,700 early in 1944.

Before the massive deportations to Treblinka death camp in July 1942 confirmed the half-believed rumours about the planned fate of the Jews, ghetto opinion was generally against resistance for fear of attracting even worse reprisals. The first Warsaw ghetto group, the right-wing Zionist ZZW or Irgun Zwai Leumi, had about 400 insurgents with some training and light weapons. After July 1942 a more centre-Left oriented group formed—the ZOB. Some weapons were supplied to the ZOB by the Home Army once it had proved its serious intentions, and most others were acquired on the black market; eventually it had some 600 members, with little training and armed mainly with pistols. There was little co-operation between the Irgun and ZOB. On 19 April 1943 the German attempt to transport the remaining ghetto inhabitants to Treblinka was repulsed by the two groups. They kept the Germans at bay for several days, and when the enemy broke their defences by burning the ghetto down they retreated to concealed bunkers and kept up a hit-and-run cam-

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paign against the Germans for well over a month before being almost wiped out. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was one of the epics of the European Resistance, and a humiliation for the Germans: 1,000 half-starved teenagers with pistols and grenades had heroically fought off the SS for a month.

The AK planned a national rising, code-named 'Tempest', which would begin in the east and move westwards as the Wehrmacht retreated before the Red Army. Its aims were to prevent German 'scorched earth' tactics, to speed the advance of the Russians, and to demonstrate to the world that the AK and the London government were the true representatives of Poland. 'Tempest' was launched during the Soviet spring offensive of 1944 by the AK commander Tadeusz 'Bor' Komorowski; tens of thousands of partisans attacked German troops, particularly in the eastern border area, but although they certainly helped tie down enemy units their overall impact was small. Shortages of arms were chronic; many 1939 caches proved to have deteriorated when recovered in 1944; and both practical and political difficulties had limited Allied air-drops of weapons to the AK to only some 350 tons by this period (compared with 10,000 tons dropped to the French Resistance during the war, and 5,000 even to the small Greek movement). AK units encountered by the Red Army were usually disbanded forcibly, the leaders being sent to labour camps and the men drafted into the LWP —see later section. 'Tempest' had no effect in the West, and was a political failure.

In summer 1944 the Red Army was approaching Warsaw. The Soviets now pursued a two-pronged propaganda campaign, on the one hand denouncing the AK as collaborators to Western diplomats, and on the other urging the Poles to rise against the Germans. The AK command made the fateful decision to rise in Warsaw itself as soon as the Red Army reached the gates of the city. The aim of this doomed rising was to capture the city before the Russians entered, forcing them to recognize AK control, or to crush the movement by force at the moment when its success had legitimised it in Western Allied eyes as the true representative of the Polish people.

The plan had several fatal flaws. Some arms stockpiles were outside Warsaw and inaccessible at short notice. The planning was hasty and tactically faulty. The assessment of likely German and Soviet reactions was based on appealing but false intelligence. Too much weight was placed on the hasty withdrawal of the German administration late in July, and upon news of the Hitler assassination attempt; too little, upon the arrival of heavy German armoured reinforcements nearby. There was also no compelling reason why Soviet commanders should try to seize Warsaw; they already had other bridgeheads across the Vistula, more suitable to mechanised forces than the narrow streets of a devastated city. The Polish leaders also underestimated Stalin's political ruthlessness. The true driving force of the uprising was simply emotional: every element of national tradition and culture pointed the Poles towards resistance, and if the AK commanders had not ordered the rising it would probably have broken out spontaneously.

Reports of the sighting of Soviet tanks from the Praga suburb, and of German plans for deporting the city's male population, led to the passing of orders for the rising on the afternoon of 1 August. The AK in Warsaw then numbered some 40,000, of whom less than 5,000 were adequately armed; even so the German garrison was quickly defeated, and almost the whole city seized—except for several positions which would prove fatal to Polish plans. Attacks on Okecie airport were bloodily repulsed; and in Praga, east of the Vistula, the AK was also defeated, failing to hold any of the river bridges.

Ignorant of the Allies' very limited plans for flying supplies to Poland, the AK fractically wired London for arms drops. The spirit of jubilation which swept Warsaw was not shared by the AK staff. The Russians had not appeared. Unknown to the Poles, the tanks sighted in Praga were only scouts; they and the other Soviet advance forces had been sent reeling back 40 km by a German counter-offensive. The over-extended Red Army could not have helped Warsaw at that moment even if it had wished to. Hitler, murderously angry over the attempt on his life, ordered Warsaw destroyed to the last woman and child. Besides regular Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS troops the Germans also deployed a disreputable clutch of

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1. Trooper, 18th Lancers, 1939
2. Corporal, 12th Lancers, 1939

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1. Lieutenant of infantry, 1939
2,3. Privates, infantry, 1939

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1. Rifleman, 10th Mounted Rifles, 10th Mechanised Bde.; 1939
2. Tank crewman, 1939
3. Second-lieutenant, Highland Rifles, 21st Highland Div.; 1939

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1. Rifleman, 4th 'Warsaw' Rifle Regt., 2nd Rifle Div.; France, 1940
2. Lieutenant of infantry, 1st Grenadier Div.; France, 1940
3. Rifleman, Independent Highland Rifle Bde.; Norway, 1940

D

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1. Rifleman, Independent Carpathian Rifle Bde.; Tobruk, 1941
2. Rifleman, 6th 'Lwow' Rifle Bde., 5th 'Kresowa' Inf. Div.; Italy, 1944
3. Lieutenant, 4th 'Skorpion' Armd. Regt., 2nd Armd. Div.; Italy, 1945.

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1. Private, Independent Parachute Bde.; Holland, 1944
2. Second-lieutenant, 24th Lancers, 1st Armd. Div.; NW Europe, 1944-45
3. Private, 10th Dragoons, 1st Armd. Div.; NW Europe, 1944-45

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Home Army, Warsaw Uprising, August 1944

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1. Infantry private, 1st Inf. Div. 'Tadeusz Kosciuszko', LWP; 1945
2. Tank crewman, 1st Polish Armd.Bde., LWP; 1944-45
3. Infantry private, 1st Inf. Div., LWP; 1945

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SS Police companies, penal detachments, and SS units recruited among Soviet renegades. The worst were the so-called SS-Sturmbrigade Dirlewanger, made up of German SS men convicted of military and civilian crimes; and part of the Kaminski Brigade, or '29.Waffen Grenadier Division der SS' (RONA), a largely Ukrainian collaborationist anti-partisan unit[1].

Strengthened by modest amounts of captured weapons, including a few tanks, the AK planned to hold out until the Russians arrived in their barricaded streets. The German plan was to push the Poles away from the Vistula and the bridges separating them from a possible Red Army link-up. Initially the AK did well; inexperienced in city fighting, German units lost many men and tanks in savage fighting in the narrow streets, taking heavy casualties for little gain.

5 August was a day of horror. The Dirlewanger and Kaminski units attacked the weakly-held Wola district at odds of five to one; they gained little ground, but captured many civilians—whom they massacred in the course of a drunken rampage. By conservative estimate some 10,000 men, women and children were murdered on that single day. On the 6th, command of the German forces passed to SS-Obergruppenführer von dem Bach-Zelewski[2]; even his grim record as an anti-partisan commander had not prepared him for the medieval butchery of Wola. Kaminski's unit was pulled out and he himself was shot. Dirlewanger, a psychopathic killer and child-molester, escaped a similar fate through his highly-placed SS connections. The Germans changed tactics, calling in specialist units such as pioneer teams, and using Goliath remote-controlled demolition tanks to blast the barricades. Artillery and Stuka attacks helped push civilian casualties to appalling levels.

Poorly armed, surrounded, and cut off from food and ammunition supplies, the Poles pleaded over the wireless for more Allied air-drops. After ill-fated attempts by British, South African and Polish crews these were stopped due to heavy crew losses. Polish crews took over, but losses in men and aircraft soon exceeded the nominal squadron strength. Stalin refused Allied requests for a shuttle run via Soviet territory; first he claimed that the uprising was over, and later he branded the AK as 'criminals'. American officials were aghast at such duplicity; Churchill suggested sending a flight anyway, but Roosevelt, ill and conciliatory, backed off from so forceful a step.

The fighting continued for more than a month; but on 9 September the Poles requested surrender terms. Before these could be agreed the Red Army renewed its assault on Praga, capturing the east bank by the 13th. That day the USAAF received permission from Stalin for a shuttle run; but since large parts of Warsaw were now in German hands most of the containers fell among the enemy. Stalin's change of mind is unexplained. Some attribute it to British or Polish Communist pressure; more cynical observers suggest that Stalin did not want the AK to surrender until it was more thoroughly beaten.

Polish LWP elements fighting alongside the Red Army made several river crossing attempts, but these were short-lived and costly. There was some Soviet air-supply by night, but not enough material reached the AK. By the month's end, with no Russian advance in sight, the Poles had no alternative. On 4 October the AK surrendered Warsaw. The US and Britain publicly warned the Germans to treat the captured insurgents as regular prisoners of war, or face reprisals.

In the 63 days of fighting over 200,000 Poles died in Warsaw; about half of the 40,000 AK insurgents were killed. (To put this figure in perspective, Britain's total military and civilian deaths during her six years of warfare were about 357,000; total US ground combat deaths in three and a half years were 202,434.) The Germans lost some 16,000 dead and missing—a heavy cost, given the numbers involved. A political and military failure, the Warsaw Uprising was a moral victory, though a terribly costly one. It demonstrated heroically the sacrifices Poland was willing to endure to free herself of the tyranny of her totalitarian neighbours. It was also the first chill breath of the Cold War, in which hopes for a peaceful post-war world began to wither; US and

[1] See also MAA 34 Revised, *The Waffen-SS*.

[2] It is ironic that Bach-Zelewski, Kaminski, and Gen. Rokossowski—commanding the Red Army opposite Warsaw—were all of Polish or part-Polish stock.

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British leaders were disgusted by Stalin's ruthlessness, and saw Soviet Russia with new eyes.

The crushing of the Uprising broke the back of the AK; apart from small bands in the western countryside, the Home Army was disbanded in October 1944. When the Red Army entered Warsaw in January 1945 they found a ghost town. The entire surviving civilian population had been deported; and like Romans in a latter-day Carthage, the Germans had burned and dynamited all remaining buildings.

The Polish People's Army (LWP)

Of the 200,000 Polish soldiers captured by the Red Army in 1939, about 70,000 were evacuated by Anders. Most of the surviving officers left with him, but there was a handful of pro-Soviet Poles who either argued that Poland should face the inevitable and concede losses in territory and sovereignty in exchange for German land, or who were simply Communists and accepted Stalin's dictums. These officers had been urging Stalin to form a pro-Soviet Polish Army, but he was unwilling to do so until after he severed relations with the Sikorski government over the Katyn scandal. Following this, the Soviets began forming a counter-government around a group of Communists living in Moscow since 1941 who called themselves the ZPP or Union of Polish Patriots. A parallel army was created, called the LWP (Ludowe Wojsko Polskie, or Polish People's Army), and a training camp was set up south of Moscow. The first units formed were the 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division under Gen. Zygmunt Berling, and the 1st Polish Armoured Brigade. Troops were recruited from the prison camps, from Soviet soldiers of Polish extraction and from volunteers. For many troops the choice between rotting away in a labour camp or aiding in the liberation of their homeland was an easy decision, regardless of the political affiliation of the LWP. Owing to the NKVD executions and the Anders evacuation there was a severe shortage of officers, and this would plague the LWP throughout the war. It was relieved by recruiting officers from the Soviet Army. Some of these were of Polish extraction, but most were Ukrainian or Byelorussians. On average, about 40 per cent of LWP officers and NCOs were non-Polish Red Army men, but these percentages were far higher in technically oriented units like air, artillery or communication groups.

In October 1943 the 1st Infantry Division went into action during the battle for Lenino near Smolensk. The Poles were involved in very heavy fighting on 12–14 October; casualties amounted to about 25 per cent of the men, and the Division was withdrawn to the Smolensk region. As the Red Army advanced westward more and more Polish conscripts became available and these new troops were sent to form an expanded 1st Polish Army under Berling's command. This formation (roughly equivalent to a British or American Corps) consisted of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Infantry

A mountain patrol of the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Div. prepare to go out in the Agnone-Carpinone area, 29 March 1944. Their very modern-looking outfits comprise hooded snow-overalls, khaki visored caps with wool-faced earflaps, and brown canvas harnesses incorporating large pouches capable of taking Bren magazines, probably of Canadian manufacture. Snow-goggles are worn; skis were often used when appropriate. British SMLE rifles and Mills grenades are carried.

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Divisions plus supporting troops, and by the summer of 1944 numbered about 90,000 men. Two other armies were formed, the 2nd and 3rd Polish Armies, but the latter was subsequently disbanded and merged with the 2nd Polish Army. A scheme to create an entire Polish Front (equivalent to a Western Army) was abandoned due to a lack of sufficient officers and staff.

In July 1944 the 1st Polish Army entered combat as part of the 8th Guards Army of the 1st Byelorussian Front during the offensive over the Bug River, and was the first Polish unit to cross the border into Poland. The 1st Polish Army took part in the assault on Deblin and Pulawy in late July and early August, and the 1st Polish Armoured Brigade fought in the battle to hold the Studzianki bridgehead on the west bank of the Vistula south of Warsaw. In September, Berling's forces were moved up to the Praga suburb opposite Warsaw. On 16 September attempts began to ford the river and link up with the AK, but though several tenuous bridgeheads were gained they had to be abandoned on 23 September. The summer offensive ended with the 1st and 2nd Infantry Divisions pushing the Germans' Vistula river bridgehead north of Warsaw back over to the west bank of the river.

The 1st Polish Army remained in position in Praga through the winter, and in January took part in the bitter-sweet capture of Warsaw. Berling's troops fought during the rapid drive through central Poland, liberating Bydgoszcz on 28 January. The 1st Polish Army was then transferred northward and took part in the battles along the Baltic coast. The bulk of the army fought in the brutal street battles in the port city of Kolobrzeg (Kolberg), while the 1st Polish Armoured Brigade took part in the battles to capture the ports of Gdansk (Danzig) and Gdynia. The 1st Polish Army lost 20,000 men during the winter battles. It remained opposite the port of Szczecin (Stettin) while regrouping for the final drive on Berlin.

By the time of the final spring offensive, the 2nd Polish Army, under the command of Gen. K. Swierzczewski (pronounced Svyezh-chef'-ski), had entered the field. It consisted of the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Infantry Divisions and the 1st Polish Armoured Corps. The 2nd Polish Army was committed to the 1st Ukrainian Front immediately north of the Czech border. By this stage of the war the Polish rôle was fairly substantial, amounting to about 200,000 troops, some ten per cent of the force taking part in Zhukov's and Koniev's drive on Berlin. The 1st Polish Army struck across the Odra and Old Odra River, crossing the Hohenzollern Canals. On 1 March 1945 the 1st Independent Warsaw Cavalry Brigade launched the last Polish cavalry charge of the war when it overran German anti-tank positions near Schonfeld. In the last days of fighting, the 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division was given the honour of sending its troops into the Berlin fighting, where they took part in the skirmishes around the Reichs Chancellery and the Reichstag. The 2nd Polish Army drove southward and fought their way into the outskirts of Prague. In these final battles the two Polish armies of the LWP lost 32,000 men.

Gen. K. Sosnkowski, C-in-C Polish Army following Gen. Sikorski's death in 1943, congratulates a second-lieutenant of the Carpathian Rifle Div.; beside him is Polish 2nd Corps commander Gen. W. Anders. Both generals wear collar patches of rank and shoulder strap ranking, the latter repeated on Sosnkowski's khaki FS cap. He wears the 3rd Div. shoulder patch, and Anders the 2nd Corps patch—a white Warsaw mermaid on a red shield. Anders habitually wore the black tanker's beret with national and rank insignia. Note that unlike other decorations the Virtuti Militari Cross is worn by both generals fully displayed, rather than simply as a ribbon.

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Hope in Ashes

For Poles of the wartime generation there had been no comfortable escape. Not to have fought and resisted would have been to sacrifice their identity and honour to the psychopathic violence of the Nazis and the NKVD. Imbued with the romantic heroism of their bloodstained past, they chose the call of arms and suffered the consequences. Poland sustained the most severe human and material losses of any country in the Second World War. Six million Polish citizens died—or one out of every five. Half of these were Jews, and the most vital Jewish community in Europe all but vanished. Warsaw was more thoroughly destroyed than any other city, and the losses in the uprising of 1944 alone exceeded the combined toll of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Of the soldiers, over 150,000 died on the battlefield, and untold thousands more in the camps. Many of Poland's finest young men and women lay dead in the cold rubble of Warsaw, in thousands of unmarked graves stretching across Europe from Falaise to Monte Cassino, to the banks of the Bzura, to Lenino, and to Katyn.

For the soldiers of the Polish Army in the West, it was defeat in victory. The conclusion of the war mocked every hope they held for their homeland. For the LWP, it was a soured victory. The enormous task of moving millions of Poles from

Sherman tank crew of 1st Polish Armoured Div. joke with a Black Watch sergeant shortly before the Caen break-out, 8 August 1944. The Poles wear khaki denim tank overalls; although they became more common later, at this stage of the campaign distinctive unit insignia were not generally worn.

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the eastern borderlands, across the breadth of the devastated countryside to new homes in the captured German lands was just beginning. The war continued for several more years along the eastern border between the LWP and remnants of the Ukrainian UPA and NSZ partisan forces. The AK had laid down its arms, but out of vindictiveness the new Communist government threw 70,000 of them in prison. Some AK soldiers refused to surrender and formed various guerilla bands such as NIE and WIN, which waged a bitter civil war with the LWP and UB Communist security forces. In the civil war between the Communist forces and the various Polish and Ukrainian guerilla bands, another 100,000 Poles died. In 1947 the sham coalition government was swept away, leaving former NKVD agent Boleslaw Bierut as political leader, and the famous Soviet general K. Rokossowski as head of the LWP. It was a time of political expediency and opportunism, and even the leader of the Communist GL resistance, Wladyslaw Gomulka, was arrested and convicted of 'nationalist deviationism'. It was a very grim peace.

It would be wrong to view the sacrifices of the war years as totally futile. Deep and lasting pride in the heroism of their soldiers was one of the few consolations left to the Poles in the arid decade after the war. The memory of the Poles' stiff-necked resistance was not lost on the Soviets. Red Army tanks crushed the popular uprisings in

A Bren gunner watches vehicles of 1st Polish Armd. Div. move past into Gilza, Holland, early in 1945. The divisional patch is worn on the greatcoat sleeve below the ubiquitous national title; and in the original print it can be seen repeated on a narrow white rectangle just inboard of the left rear mud-flap of the carrier. On the flap itself is the national marking, 'PL' in red on a white oval.

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An officer and radio-operator of the Polish Independent Parachute Bde. look across the Rhine towards the positions of British 1st Airborne Div. at Arnhem following the ill-fated drop of September 1944. Polish paras were dressed identically to their British counterparts except for helmet and collar insignia—see Plate F1.

East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia: no Soviet tanks intervened in Poland during the disturbances in 1956, 1970 or 1976. The Poles have been able to carve out a society more liberal than most in the Soviet Empire, fragilely shielded by memories of the bitter glory of the Polish Army 1939–45. As this book goes to press there are faint but hopeful signs that the candle may be burning a little brighter.

Sources

Polish participation in the Second World War has been the subject of thousands of books, though very few of these have appeared in English. One single bibliography, by no means comprehensive, lists over 8,000 titles on the subject. The theme is of unending fascination in Poland, and each year hundreds of books are published on the subject including several major historical surveys. In English there are a handful of memoirs, primarily those of officers serving in the exile Army like Anders, Sosabowski and others. There are no satisfactory histories of the September Campaign in English, and coverage of the other actions is spotty, with the exception of the Warsaw Uprising, which has been well treated in a number of serious historical works. While there have been hundreds of books published outside Poland by various Polish veterans' groups, unfortunately hardly any of these were published in English. The books listed below provide a very brief sampling of the material available, with emphasis on books in English, books on uniforms, and major historical surveys.

Uniforms

J. Wielhorski and A. Zaremba, *Equites Poloni* (Privately published plates: NY, 1964)

Dr T. Kryska-Karski, *Piechota 1939–45* (Privately published journal: London, 1970–74)

Karol Linder, *et al.*, *Zolnierz Polski 1939–1965* (WMON: Warsaw, 1965)

History

1939 Campaign

Historical Commission of Polish General Staff, *Polskie Sily Zbrojne* (Sikorski Institute: London 1959–) This is a multi-volume study of the 1939 campaign as well as the Army-in-Exile. The volumes covering the 1939 campaign are about two-thirds complete, covering through the second week of the campaign. This is the most thorough and accurate account of army operations, but its prospects for eventual completion are not clear.

E. Kozlowski, *et al.*, *Wojna Obronna Polski 1939* (WMON: Warsaw, 1939)

R. Kennedy, *The German Campaign in Poland* (US Army, 1956)

Army-in-Exile

Historical Commission of the Polish General Staff, *Polskie Sily Zbrojne* (Sikorski Institute: London, 1959–)

W. Anders, *An Army in Exile* (Macmillan: London, 1959)

Home Army

T. Bor-Komorowski, *The Secret Army* (Macmillan: London, 1951)

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J. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944* (Cambridge University Press, 1974)
S. Korbonski, *The Polish Underground State* (East European Quarterly, Boulder, CO, 1978)

Polish People's Army
W. Jurgielewicz, *Ludowe Wojsko Polskie* (WMON: Warsaw, 1974)

Uniform Exhibits

There are a number of museum collections featuring Polish Army uniforms from the 1939–45 period. The most comprehensive is the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw. On permanent exhibit is a collection from 1939 and the Polish People's Army. There is an occasional exhibit of Polish Army-in-Exile uniforms and other special exhibits. There are a number of other smaller museums in Poland with less thorough collections. The largest collection of Polish wartime uniforms outside Poland is in the Sikorski Museum in London, which stages an occasional display, usually in commemoration of anniversaries recalling the war years.

Photo Notes

The majority of the photos in this book are official Polish Army photos either from the collection of the Pilsudski Museum in New York, the Sikorski Museum in London, or the author's personal collection. There is very poor photographic coverage of the September Campaign, but the Sikorski Institute quarters the 1940–45 photo files of the Polish armed forces which covers the Army in considerable detail. Due to staff and financial limitations the collection is largely inaccessible. There are several large wartime photo collections in Poland, notably CAF, and at the Army Museum in Warsaw. There is a surprisingly large amount of photo coverage of the Warsaw Uprising, though this tends to be scattered over Poland, Britain and the US. The author would like to thank his friends in Poland, Britain and the United States for their help in obtaining the photos used in this book.

Group of partisans from an unidentified Home Army unit in Eastern Poland pose for a rare snapshot. The woman wears an issue Polish Army greatcoat, and most of the men Army forage caps.

The Plates

A1: Trooper, 18th Lancers; 1939

The square-topped 'rogatywka' field cap was introduced from 1937; it bore a grey embroidered Polish military eagle only. (In 1939 some units still wore the earlier khaki sidecap, similar to the US 'overseas cap', with a white metal eagle.) The field cap should not be confused with the contemporary service dress headgear, the garrison cap. This too had the traditional squared crown, but stiffened; it had a black leather peak and a coloured band bearing rank insignia beneath the eagle badge. Bands were in arm or service colours except in the cavalry, who wore regimental colours. Officers' garrison caps had silver piping at the top edge of the band and along the diagonals of the square crown. The Light Horse regiments and Frontier Defence units wore a similar cap with a round 'English' crown.

Uniform reforms of the early 1930s modernised and standardised Polish uniforms, and removed distinctions of cut between officers and enlisted men. The M1936 wool tunic, of a khaki shade slightly greener than its British counterpart, was of conventional appearance, with four pockets, shoulder straps, and a fall collar; buttons were oxidised silver. An identical summer version in linen was issued. Cavalry wore matching breeches reinforced with leather along the inseam and seat, with spurred riding boots. This trooper wears the

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A machine gun squad of a Home Army unit in the suburb of Praga during the Warsaw Uprising, 1 August 1944. A variety of weapons is visible, including the Browning 'rkm' and the German MG15. They wear bits and pieces of uniform with civilian clothes, and red and white brassards on the left arm.

peacetime collar insignia of 18th Lancers: a swallow-tail pennon in white and light blue with a central scarlet stripe, enclosed by the traditional Polish zig-zag braid. This was not supposed to be worn in combat.

He wears the brown leather belt and the Y-straps typical of cavalry, with two triple Mauser ammunition pouch sets, an M1929 carbine and M1933 bread bag slung, and an entrenching tool and bayonet on the belt. The gasmask is obscured here. Horse furniture comprises the M1925 enlisted man's bridle and saddle, the latter with attachments under the left leg for the M1934 sabre; examples of the M1921 sabre, or earlier French, Russian or Prussian types were not unknown in 1939. The rolled M1936 greatcoat is strapped at the front of the saddle, and an oat-sack over saddle bags at the rear; the blanket was carried under the shabraque.

The lance, of French type, is fitted with the regimentally-coloured pennon. The lance was not supposed to have been carried into action in 1939, but there was some unit variation: some left it in barracks, others began the campaign with it but handed it over to the baggage train subsequently. Lances flying the regimental CO's pennant and squadron pennants were retained.

A2: Corporal, 12th Lancers; 1939

The same basic uniform; note that the French Adrian-style helmet was retained by virtually all cavalry and horse artillery troops in 1939, as well as by some artillery, reserve infantry, and supporting services. The only insignia supposed to be retained in action were the rank devices on the shoulder straps, shown in detail in the accompanying monochrome diagram; this corporal can just be seen to wear the two silver, red-trimmed chevrons of his grade. The regimental number, a monogram referring to a unit honour-title, or some other traditional unit device was directly attached to the shoulder strap of peacetime service dress, but on combat uniform it was worn on a removable slide. The regimental collar pennon

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was amaranth red over light blue with a white stripe for the 12th Lancers; it is enclosed by zig-zag braid in silver NCOs' embroidery.

The weapon is the squad light automatic, the 'rkm wz.28' derivative of the Belgian M1928 Browning Automatic Rifle. Gunners wore larger, canvas magazine pouches in pairs, the top edges slanting upwards to the centre of each pair.

B1: Lieutenant of infantry, 1939
The field cap—which bore no insignia apart from the eagle—and the greatcoat were basically similar for all ranks. Officers wore rank stars on the shoulder straps; and all infantry ranks wore a stripe of yellow above blue diagonally across the coat collar points. Officers generally retained breeches and top-boots for field dress, the latter spurred for officers entitled to a horse, and of fine quality. The officer's belt is of Sam Browne type; other shoulder belts support the mapcase and binoculars on the left, and the holster for the ViS pistol on the right. The linen WSR gasmask pouch is slung behind the right hip on a fabric strap.

B2, B3: Privates of infantry; 1939
Standard infantry dress and equipment are shown from front and rear. The helmet is the M1931 Polish type, finished with olive drab 'Salamander' paint in which was mixed tiny grains of cork to give a rough texture. Infantry formations had priority issue, although by 1939 some artillery and other arms and services had also received their allocation. The winter-issue M1936 wool uniform had straight trousers for the infantry, with these short ankle-puttees and the laced M1934 boot (sometimes seen un-blackened in 1939). The canvas M1932 knapsack bore a mess tin in olive drab (or dull aluminium) on the flap; the tent section or blanket was often wrapped round the greatcoat, which was strapped to the

Sapper unit of the 1st Infantry Div., LWP, before going into action in Byelorussia. They wear uniforms of Russian cut, with Russian-made forage caps of Polish pattern.

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knapsack horseshoe-fashion. The entrenching tool and Mauser-style bayonet were carried ahead of the M1933 canvas breadbag on the left hip; the similar pouch for the WSR gasmask was slung on the right hip, to balance the breadbag. Mauser pouches are worn on the belt; note that the knapsack suspenders take the place of the Y-straps worn by the cavalry. The standard weapon was the Polish-made Mauser rifle, of which three principal versions were in service in 1939: the M1898 rifle, comparable to the German 98a; the M1898 carbine; and the M1929 carbine, comparable to the German 98k. The infantry collar patches, in blue with a yellow-piped scalloped rear edge and white zig-zag edging, would not have been worn in combat.

C1 : Rifleman, 10th Mounted Rifles, 10th Mechanised Bde.; 1939

The only fully mechanised brigade in the Polish Army in 1939, this formation was nicknamed 'The Black Brigade' from its black leather coats; note the cloth collar and shoulder straps, and the deep double breast with the join down the right side. The 10th Mechanised (or Motorised Cavalry) Bde. was almost unique in the Polish Army in retaining in 1939 the old 1916 German helmet, painted khaki. The coat covers normal cavalry uniform tunic and breeches, worn with riding boots; symbolic 'spurs'—metal strips round the boot heels—were worn by motorised artillery of this brigade with service dress, but not in the field, and on the evening dress boots by all brigade officers. Note cavalry leather equipment with Y-straps.

C2 : Tank crewman; 1939

Tank officers wore the black leather coat, but enlisted men normally wore this simple khaki overall. The headgear is the khaki-painted Polish derivative of the French motorised troops' helmet;

Infantrymen of the 1st 'Tadeusz Kosciuszko' Inf. Div., LWP, under inspection at the Sielce training camp near Moscow, summer 1943. While pre-war rank insignia were retained the national eagle had its traditional crown and Amazon shield removed, for ideological reasons. The uniforms were a pale grey-green or khaki—see Plate H. Most of these soldiers carry the PPSh sub-machine gun.

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examples of the imported French original were also to be seen. The weapon is the ViS pistol; the canister is that of the old French RSC gasmask.

C3: Second-Lieutenant, Highland Rifle regiment, 21st Highland Div.; 1939

Replacing the 'rogatywka' in the 21st and 22nd Highland Divisions was this felt mountaineer's hat derived from traditional dress in the Podhale region of southern Poland. On the front is the eagle above a rank star; on the side, above the knot of the silver cord, an eagle's feather is fixed by a clasp in the form of the divisional emblem—a broken cross in pine twigs. This emblem is repeated both on the collar of the traditional cape—which replaced the greatcoat in mountain units—below the yellow/blue infantry stripe; and on the infantry-pattern tunic collar patches. The cape was often seen worn over the left shoulder but hanging back from the right shoulder. It obscures the ViS pistol and the sabre in this painting. The 11th Highland Div. wore the 'huculski' hat, traditional to the Eastern Carpathians.

D1: Rifleman, 4th 'Warsaw' Rifle Regiment, 2nd Rifle Division; France, 1940

During the Phoney War period Polish troops in France were provided with a motley collection of old horizon blue uniforms, 'bonnets de police', képis and berets. Only with the formation of the 1st Grenadier and 2nd Rifle Divs. in spring 1940 did they begin to receive French 1935 khaki uniforms. Some Polish infantry received brown berets instead of the khaki 'bonnet de police'; all Poles retained their national eagle insignia, in metal, embroidery, or pressed rubber, and their own ranking. Some wore diamond-shaped French collar patches in Polish colours—e.g. dark blue with yellow piping at the upper edges for infantry—but without unit numbers. The units of the 2nd Rifle Div. wore 'bayonet'-shaped patches in regimental colours. Cavalry and armour wore pennons on their collars; the 10th Mechanised Bde. wore standard French tankers' clothing and equipment. French M1935 infantry helmets were worn with the Polish eagle painted or pinned to the front; in a few cases a proper helmet-plate was supplied.

This soldier of the 4th Rifles wears the brown beret with rubber national insignia, and the regimental collar patch repeated left of it. The patch—light green divided by dark blue—is worn on the tunic collar; there is no other decoration. Standard French field dress consists of the tunic, the 'golf' trousers of 1938, puttees, and laced ankle boots. The 1939 cartridge pouch set is worn with Y-straps, modified 1934 knapsack with blanket roll, ANP.31 gasmask slung in a satchel on his left hip, and musette on his right: the 1935 canteen would be slung centrally on the back of the belt. He carries the 1916 Berthier rifle.

Another photo of the 1st Inf. Div. at Sielce shows full marching kit, with the Soviet 1940 steel helmet painted with the white 'Piast' eagle.

D2: Lieutenant of infantry, 1st Grenadier Div.; France, 1940

The officers wore the 'bonnet de police' with the national eagle pinned to the front and rank stars below and to the left. The only other insignia are metal rank stars on the shoulder straps of the French greatcoat. He carries the slung gasmask bag and is armed with a holstered M1935A automatic.

D3: Rifleman, Independent Highland Rifle Bde.; Norway, 1940

The Highland units were intended to be equipped as the Chasseurs Alpins alongside whom they

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On board a train taking them to their baptism of fire at Lenino, 'Kosciuszko' Division infantry clearly display their Russian uniforms and kit and Polish ranking. They are armed with Moisin Nagant rifles.

served, and received a varied collection of equipment. The helmet has a painted eagle insignia; normal cloth headgear was a khaki beret. The jacket is the windproof canvas 'motorcycle jacket'; like the slightly different 'armoured car jacket' it was in great demand for its warmth in this campaign, and is worn over the tunic. The traditional cape of the Polish Highland units is represented by a French artillery cape. The 'golf' trousers and puttees are worn with over-socks. The leather equipment is the old 1915 pattern, although the rifle is the new MAS.36; the usual gasmask bag is slung behind the hip.

E1: Rifleman, Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade; Tobruk, Libya, 1941

Indistinguishable from their British comrades apart from Polish ranking, the men of this brigade wore British issue KD tropical clothing and khaki battledress and received 1937 webbing equipment and British weapons. This soldier wears a khaki pullover with KD shirt and shorts, hose-tops and ankle puttees, and the sand-painted British helmet decorated with a Polish eagle on a red background. He carries the Rifle No. 1 Mk III SMLE.

E2: Rifleman, 6th 'Lwow' Rifle Bde., 5th 'Kresowa' Infantry Div.; Italy, autumn 1944

This Bren gunner wears British battledress of so-called '1940 pattern' with exposed buttons and unpleated pockets, and standard 1937 webbing; rubber Wellington boots were sometimes observed in the muddy Italian autumn. We have torn his helmet net to show the painted eagle clearly. Small diamond-shaped collar patches were worn on the BD blouse in traditional colours—here, infantry dark blue trimmed in yellow. Below the national title at the top of the sleeve is the divisional patch, and below it the white lion on a red and light blue patch of the 'Lwow' Brigade. After Cassino the 8th Army patch—dark blue square patch, white shield with yellow cross—was worn on the upper right sleeve; no unit insignia were generally worn during the build-up for Cassino, for security reasons.

E3: Lieutenant, 4th 'Skorpion' Armoured Regt., 2nd Armoured Div.; Italy, early 1945

The black Royal Armoured Corps beret bears an embroidered national eagle over two rank stars and, on the left side, the unit insignia of an embroidered silver scorpion on a red rhomboid. Regimental collar insignia were painted metal swallow-tail pennons, black over orange with a red central stripe, with a white metal scorpion superimposed. Silver five-point rank stars are pinned to each shoulder strap. The divisional patch appears on the left upper sleeve immediately above a red stripe resembling a British arm-of-service stripe; the 8th Army patch would be worn on the right upper sleeve. This subaltern is painted as he might appear for a parade behind the lines; he wears his Virtuti Militari Cross, a webbing pistol set scrubbed almost white with a lanyard from the right shoulder, and light yellow tank gauntlets. In common with most officers he has

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acquired pre-war BD with concealed buttons.

F1: Private, Polish Independent Parachute Bde.; Holland 1944

Paratroopers wore much the same uniforms and kit as their British comrades—rimless steel helmets, battledress, Denison jump-smocks, and 1937 webbing sometimes augmented by a 'toggle-rope' for crossing obstacles. The weapon is the Sten sub-machine gun. The only Polish distinctions are the yellow eagle painted on the helmet; the dove-grey collar patches trimmed in yellow and bearing silver parachute insignia; and—not illustrated—light bluish-grey berets bearing conventional Polish national and rank insignia.

F2: Second-Lieutenant, 24th Lancers, 1st Polish Armd. Div.; NW Europe, 1944 45

The earth-brown denim overall worn by Polish tank crews seems normally to have had two thigh pockets instead of the more usual single left pocket. Only the rank star on the shoulder strap distinguishes this officer's overall; the collar of his BD blouse, folded outside it, bears the regimental pennons—for 24th Lancers, white with a yellow stripe. The national eagle and a rank star are embroidered on the black Royal Armoured Corps beret. The scrubbed webbing set includes an open-topped pistol holster on the long RAC leg strap; note lanyard, characteristically worn from the right shoulder wherever the holster was fixed. Officers wore brown boots.

F3: Private, 10th Dragoons, 1st Polish Armd. Div.; NW Europe, 1944 45

The 10th Mot. Cav. Bde. included this regiment of motorised infantry, and the regimental pennons

Crewmen of the LWP's 24th Self-Propelled Artillery Regt. are briefed beside their SU-85; they wear Russian black canvas padded crew helmets, and the man on the left has a Russian quilted jacket in khaki drab—the other two wear the LWP tunic. The 'Piast-style' eagle shows clearly on the side of the SU.

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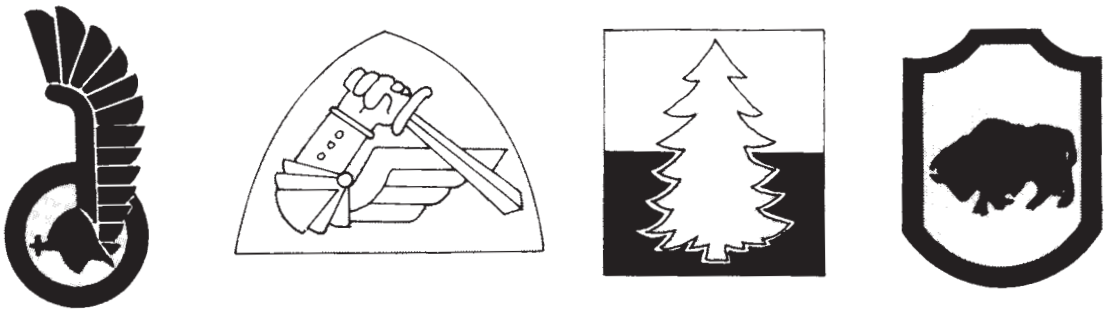

Polish Divisional Insignia: (a) 1st Armoured Div.—stylised rendition of 17th-century 'winged hussar' heavy cavalry helmet, in black and orange, the traditional Polish armoured branch colours. (b) 2nd Armd. Div.—silver or light grey on khaki patch. (c) 3rd Carpathian Rifle Div.—green pine on white over red. (d) 5th 'Kresowa' Inf. Div.—dark brown Polish bison and edge, pale yellow shield.

(amaranth and orange divided by a green stripe) are sewn to the BD blouse. The black left shoulder strap and lanyard commemorate the old 10th Bde. of 1939. The national shoulder title is worn above, on the left sleeve, the 1st Armd. Div. patch. In this regiment the right sleeve bore instead a blue shield-shaped patch bearing the Cross of St Andrew and the arms of the town of Lanark in Scotland, where the 10th Dragoons trained. The helmet eagle, 1937 pattern webbing, '1940 pattern' BD, and Thompson sub-machine gun are all conventional.

G: Home Army; Warsaw, August 1944

There was no uniformity of clothing among the AK. Basically civilian dress was supplemented by old 1939 military items where available, and by captured German uniform. Early in the fighting a large German warehouse was captured and thousands of German Army and Waffen-SS camouflage garments of all kinds were distributed; these very popular items were known as 'panterki' among the insurgents. White/red brassards were required wear, sometimes with additional improvised unit insignia, the Polish eagle, the letters 'WP'—Wojsko Polskie, 'Polish Army'—or the initials of various underground militias. Helmets sometimes bore a large white eagle instead of the white/red band shown in G1; this figure otherwise wears civilian dress, and carries one of the flamethrowers home-made by the insurgents. G2 is a member of one of the Boy Scout (Grey Ranks) companies; he wears a black German field service cap with an eagle badge, and a 'panterka'—here, the reversible winter camouflage oversuit of the Wehrmacht in 'water pattern'. His weapon is the Polish-made Blyskawica, a derivative of the Sten gun and even less reliable than its model. G3 is a girl courier; she wears an earlier-pattern German Army smock in 'splinter' pattern camouflage, a German Army field service cap with added eagle badge, and goggles to protect her eyes from toxic fumes when travelling through the sewers. Most couriers were unarmed, but some were given small-calibre pistols of little use for serious fighting.

H1: Infantryman, 1st 'Tadeusz Kosciuszko' Division, LWP; 1945

When formed initially in 1943 the LWP at Sielce wore entirely Soviet uniforms. For political reasons new uniforms more closely resembling the 1936 Polish pattern were later issued. A tunic with a fall collar, breeches, and high boots or ankle boots with puttees were worn with the 'rogatywka' or 'konfederatka' field cap. Helmets and webbing and leather equipment were of Soviet pattern. Uniform colour varied; a grey-green shade was common, but some were a more conventional khaki, and note that the new costume never completely replaced the original Soviet clothing issue. A khaki greatcoat similar to the pre-war Polish type was issued, though not universally. This No. 1 of a DP machine gun

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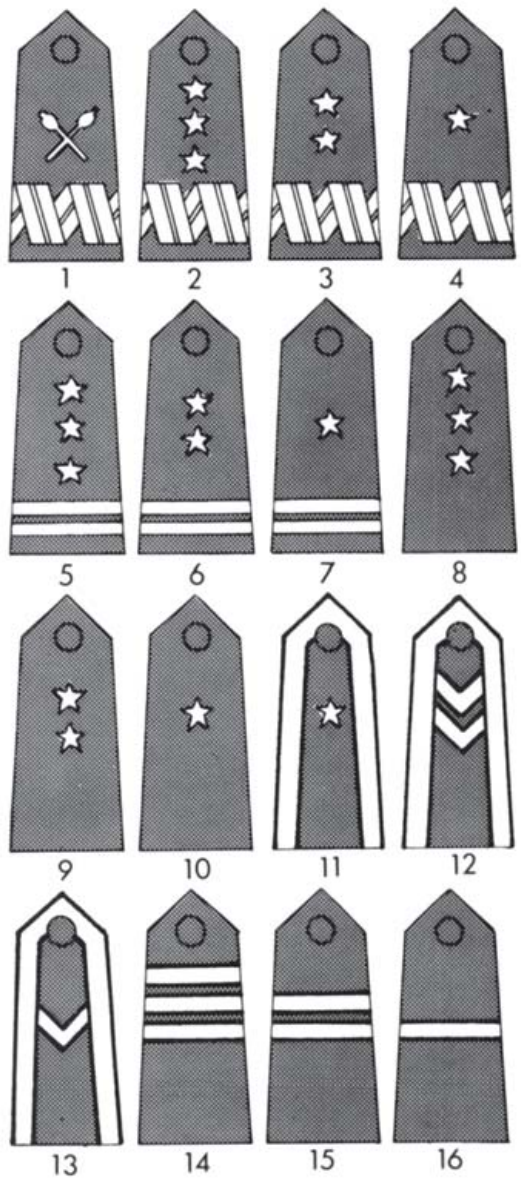
('record player') wears the Soviet helmet with the Piast-style eagle painted on the front; this lacked the traditional crown and Amazon shield, for ideological reasons, and was scornfully christened 'the plucked chicken' when the LWP reached Poland. (Many soldiers substituted pre-war badges with the crown broken off for wear on their caps; finally a modified, crownless version of the pre-war style was issued.) Collar pennons of a new triangular shape followed pre-war branch colours, governed by two sets of regulations in 1943 and 1945. The infantry pennons were originally halved blue over yellow, yellow over blue being worn by anti-tank rifle units; this was reversed in the 1945 regulations.

H2: Tank crewman, 1st Polish Armoured Brigade 'Heroes of Westerplatte', LWP; 1944–45

This tanker wears a khaki LWP tunic over khaki overalls tucked into low boots, and the standard Soviet Army black cloth summer-type tank helmet. Dark blue overalls and dark blue cloth helmets were also issued to some degree. The weapon is the TT Model 1935 automatic. Specialist troops—tankers, sappers, etc.—tended to use more standard Soviet issue items of clothing and equipment, for reasons of availability.

H3: Infantryman, 1st 'Tadeusz Kosciuszko' Division, LWP; 1945

The colour variation between uniform parts—cap, tunic, breeches, greatcoat—is typical. The high Soviet-style boots are worn here, as is Soviet equipment including two canvas triple magazine pouches for the PPSh.41 sub-machine gun fitted with box magazines. The cap was more common in LWP units than the Soviet 1940 helmet; it was usually worn winter and summer, although some Russian 'ushanka' fleece-lined caps were issued. Insignia are the same as for H1. Rank insignia followed pre-war Polish practice, with occasional minor variations; e.g. the rank stars were sometimes of yellow rather than white metal, and simple white embroidery replaced silver thread.



Polish Army rank insignia, 1939–45: (1) Marshal (2) General of the Army (3) General of Division (4) Brigadier-General (5) Colonel (6) Lieutenant-Colonel (7) Major (8) Captain (9) Lieutenant (10) Second-Lieutenant (11) Warrant officer (12) Staff sergeant (13) Sergeant (14) Lance sergeant (15) Corporal (16) Lance corporal.
Insignia in silver embroidery, (11)–(16) being thinly outlined red. Shoulder straps were in uniform colour, buttons on 1939 uniforms being oxidised silver colour.

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